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## Morrisville health clinic recognized

BY NANCY REMSEN • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • AUGUST 20, 2008

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Vermont now has seven community health centers that receive annual federal grants that allow them to offer primary medical and dental care and low-priced prescription drugs to all patients -- without regard to their insurance coverage.



Community Health Services of Lamoille Valley is the newest addition to the list of health programs in the state eligible for annual grants of about \$650,000 under a federal program for medically underserved regions. Other similarly designated health services are based in Bradford, Burlington, Plainfield, Richford, Rutland and St. Johnsbury. Several operate multiple sites in their regions.

The Lamoille Valley program was one of 42 that were selected for federal funding from a field of 264 applications. It was the Morrisville-based program's fifth try to win the federal designation and annual grant.

Dr. Melissa Volansky, one of nine primary physicians with the program, said it has been

heart-breaking to care for patients who delayed seeking care because of its cost and suffered adverse health consequences as a result. The new funding, she said, "helps us to open our doors to more people."

The selection of the Lamoille program for funding expands the availability of affordable, basic health services to 86,000 Vermonters, said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. For the past five years he has pushed the development of community health programs eligible for designation as "federally qualified health centers."

Sanders said he wants federally qualified health centers operating in every region of the state. "When we have 10, we will have made a very strong step forward."

"This is part of infrastructure we will need, whether or not we get national health care," Sanders said. These centers are investments in preventive medicine, he said.

"Every dollar spent in a program like this results in savings," he said. "In the long run, this will make us healthier and save us money."

Sanders has introduced a bill that would expand the health center program from 1,100 to more than 4,000 comprehensive primary care centers over five years.

For the Lamoille Valley region, the new designation means the Morrisville-based program can add dental care, expand mental health services and begin dispensing prescription medications at rock-bottom prices, said Kevin Kelley, director.

He's recruiting a dentist, he said.

Mark Woodward of Johnson serves on the health services' advisory board and has been among those waiting years for the federal designation. "Literally I was in tears when I got the message," Woodward said. "It is going to mean so much."

Contact Nancy Remsen at 651-4888 or [nremsen@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com](mailto:nremsen@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com).

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